

PLEBE-PARENT WEEKEND BANQUET
11 October 2003

Good evening, Colonel and Mrs. Phillips, Command Sergeant Major and Mrs. Butts, Cadet Enderle, parents, guests, and members of the Class of 2007. I am delighted to have the honor of sharing this occasion with you and would like to welcome all of our guests to West Point. Tonight's banquet marks the mid-point of Plebe-Parent Weekend, and the first real opportunity for our cadets and your sons and daughters to show you how they live and what they have already learned and accomplished here on their journey to join the ranks of the Long Gray Line.

I first, want to direct my remarks to the parents of the Class of 2007. To you, I will simply say, "Thank you", Thank you for a job well done. Cadets of the Class of 2007, stand up and give your parents a hand. After all, you literally wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them.

There were nearly 11,000 applicants for the Class of 2007. We enrolled 1,314 on 30 June, and tonight 1,228 of you remain. This is not a battle of attrition; it is an endeavor to meet a very high standard, because the stakes are so high, and you are so talented. This class is made up of athletes and team captains, former soldiers, scholars and class valedictorians, eagle scouts, community servants, and more. You come from all 50 states and the US territories, and from 11 foreign countries. You exemplify the diversity, potential, and enthusiasm which are some of America's greatest strengths. In this regard, you are very much like the thousands of graduates who have come before you.

But one attribute sets you apart from many previous classes. Yours is the second class in 30 years to enter the Military Academy while the nation was at war. More than anything else, it

is a testament to your commitment to the ideals of West Point. I can already see a change in you from 30 June. You are different. You have been in the fire of the crucible, and you are better for it. Your summer of Cadet Basic Training was tougher than in previous years – close quarters combat, foot marches, physical training, and the 30 hours of Operation Warrior Forge – not to mention some very tough weather. You are experiencing the exacting standards of the Military and Physical Program requirements to make you more physically fit and mentally tough, and to better prepare you to lead American soldiers in a world which is increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

Nearly 100 of your classmates have already decided that this life was not for them, and have departed, but those of you sitting here tonight, you chosen few, have not quit. You have the eye of the tiger...Fire burns in your belly and you are hungry. You have made it through the first of many challenges at West Point and should be proud of what you have done to this point. You will face many more challenges in the next 42 months, each more difficult than its predecessor. With the challenges come the training and confidence to conquer them. They are designed to educate and train you in your chosen profession, but also to teach you about yourself, to demonstrate to you the very depth of your potential. In this way, you and your class will build your individual and collective character. Over time, this character becomes your reputation, which will follow you and your class for the rest of your careers and believe it or not, your lives. How each of you respond to the many trials of West Point's daily rhythm – your desire to excel on the APFT or Obstacle Course, your professional demeanor and personal appearance, your commitment to academic excellence – will determine your character. You are all here because you want to be Army officers. Army officers lead soldiers. Both West Point and you believe

that **you have what it takes** to shoulder this responsibility and to honorably and successfully fulfill the obligations of leading America's sons and daughters in time of war.

By taking your acceptance oath and for having been given the honor of wearing the cadet uniform, you have made a commitment to the values of the Academy and to the Profession of Arms; values such as integrity, selfless service, duty and loyalty. It is a commitment to excellence for ourselves and our organizations in all that we do. It is a commitment to sacrifice for the greater good, whether it be of personal time for the benefit of the unit in peacetime, or the sacrifice of personal safety for the welfare of your soldiers in time of war. It is a commitment to duty and to your future roles as warriors and keepers of the values, which have made our Army the most powerful, most lethal, and most respected ground force on the planet. This is the Army you will lead. No matter where evil lurks or threats to our people exist, we will go there. We will go there together, and we will enter the darkness with sons and daughters of this great country ready for battle that we might preserve the light that is the American way of life. And then our enemies will understand that we *"Always Remember, and we Never Surrender."*

Class of 2007, job well done. Stay committed to excellence...Stay committed to each other...Stay committed to fulfill the expectations of the American people who have invested so heavily in your future...Stay committed to the soldiers you will lead, who will trust you with their very lives...Stay committed – GO ARMY!